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ABSTRACT

Results of a survey designed to determine the procedures which State and Regional Educational Research Associations use to review papers for their meetings are presented. Lists of these organizations, including the names and addresses of contacts, were provided by the Special Interest Group (SIG) chairperson of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Questionnaires were sent to 13 state associations and 10 regional groups. Usable responses were received from seven state associations and nine regional groups. The survey instrument consisted of 11 items, including five open-ended questions. Issues addressed by the questionnaire were: (1) frequency of meetings; (2) format of the presentations and other sessions found at these meetings; (3) procedures used to solicit and review papers, including the types of reviewers employed, the procedures for soliciting reviewers, and the criteria used by them to accept or reject papers; and (4) the acceptance rate resulting from the use of these procedures. Respondents were asked to use their last meeting as the basis for their response. The general conclusion reached was that a great deal of diversity exists in the way these associations plan for and conduct the professional aspects of their meetings. (Author/RL)

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Reviewing Papers for the Annual Meetings of State and Regional Educational Research Associations

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A paper presented as part of a symposium entitled Critical Issues in the Operation of State and Regional Research Associations held at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Los Angeles, April, 1981.

This paper presents the results of a survey designed to determine the procedures which State and Regional Educational Research Associations use to review papers for their meetings. Issues addressed herein include the frequency and structure of these meetings, the procedures used to solicit and review papers, symposia, and other presentations, and the acceptance rates resulting from the use of these review procedures. The general conclusion reached is that a great deal of diversity exists in the way these associations plan for and conduct the professional aspects of their meetings.

Procedures

As noted above, the results presented herein are based on a survey of State and Regional Educational Research Associations currently members of a Special Interest Group (SIG) of the American Educational Research Association. Lists of these organizations, including the names and addresses of contacts, were provided by the SIG chairperson. Each individual on that list was mailed a brief, specially designed questionnaire and a cover letter explaining its purpose. A follow-up letter and an additional survey form were sent to non-respondents approximately two weeks after the initial mailing.

A total of 23 forms were sent, 13 to state associations and 10 to regional groups. Responses were received from 8 state associations (62%) and 9 regional groups (90%). One state association coordinator indicated that his organization had not been active for three years, and consequently, he did not complete the questionnaire. Thus, the overall rate of useable returns was 70%. Given this, as well as the fact that one form was returned

"address unknown", and at least two others were forwarded to other contact persons, their is reason to believe that response rates may have been higher if better lists were available.

The survey instrument consisted of 11 items, including five open-ended questions. The following issues were addressed by the questionnaire: (1) the frequency of meetings; (2) the format of the presentations and other sessions found at these meetings; (3) the procedures used to solicit and review papers, including the types of reviewers employed, the procedures for soliciting reviewers, and the criteria used by them to accept or reject papers; and (4) the acceptance rate resulting from the use of these procedures. Respondents were asked to use their last meeting as the basis for their responses. Simple frequency and percentage breakdowns were used to analyze the data obtained.

Results

Table 1 presents a breakdown of the responses to each questionnaire item by type of organization (state or regional) and by total group. As can be seen in the Table, all associations responding to the survey hold at least one meeting per year. The Michigan Educational Research Association holds two meetings per year; the Washington Educational Research Association, the California Educational Research Association and the Northern Illinois Association for Research, Evaluation and Development hold AERA type meetings once a year as well as three or four other smaller sessions addressing timely subjects.

The annual meetings come in a variety of forms, as evidenced by the distribution of responses to the second questionnaire item. The large majority of organizations, however, have meetings which include paper ses-

sions, symposia, and invited speakers. Almost half of the state associations and all of the regional groups also have round tables at their meetings. A smaller number of associations have training sessions, poster sessions and reviews of research.

In general, the meetings held by regional associations appear to have a greater variety of sessions than the state association meetings. This conclusion is based on the finding that over 70% of the regional groups responding to the survey claimed to have meetings which included paper sessions, symposia, round tables and invited speakers while less than 50% of the state groups reported such a variety of sessions. Despite this pattern of responses, however, the general conclusion reached from these data is that a great deal of variety exists in the meetings held by both types of groups.

Turning now to the procedures for soliciting presenters, the Pennsylvania Educational Research Association reported that they invite all of their speakers and presenters based on their past work and experience and the perceived needs and interests of the membership. All other groups use some form of call for papers. The most frequently used approaches appear to be announcements in the organization's newsletter and special calls for papers mailed to members, and, in some cases, to non-members as well based on lists provided by other organizations. Other popular methods for soliciting presenters include recommendations from the board, personal contacts, and announcements in publications such as the Educational Researcher. Most of the organizations use more than one procedure to solicit presentations. In fact, two of the more aggressive and ambitious groups reported using at least four of the five methods listed in Table 1. Other organizations, on the other hand, appear to be much more low key and rely on one or two approaches. Some organizations prefer to use different methods for different types of presentation. For example, announcements

and calls for papers might be used for paper sessions and symposia, while personal contacts and recommendations from the program committee, the officers and board of directors would be used to select invited speakers and round table organizers. As a consequence, review procedures are used for certain types of sessions but not others (see item 4). In large part, it is precisely this variety in procedures which gives the annual meetings, and thus the organizations, their own particular character and charm.

As noted above, only one of the associations uses no review procedures of any kind (see item 5). Most of the twelve remaining associations conduct their reviews either through a program committee (50%) or a review panel designated by this committee (38%). For the most part, the reviewers are selected by the program chair (25%) or by the board of directors or other association officers (38%) (see item 6). Selections are often based on the person's area of expertise, experience in the organization, type of employer and area of residence within the state or region. Selection based on expertise helps to insure that proposals are reviewed by knowledgable individuals; consideration of the other factors helps to insure greater representation on the review panel.

As can be seen from the responses to item 7, the majority of the organizations use either two or three reviewers to rate proposals. It is perhaps noteworthy that proposals submitted to one organization, Concerned Leaders in Educational Administration and Research (CLEAR), are reviewed by five persons. More noteworthy, however, is the finding that only 43% of the state organizations and 22% of the regional organizations conduct blind reviews (see item 8). Moreover, only 31% of the organizations use rating scales of some kind in the review process (see item 10). Despite this, more than 60% of the respondents indicated that quality of the research was one of the criteria used to select papers for the meeting

(see item 9). Other criteria included appropriateness of the topic to the membership (50%), ability of the author to communicate effectively (31%), and significance of the study (19%). The lack of more structured review procedures may partly explain why more than 50% of the respondents reported that the acceptance rate for proposals was between 80% and 100% (see item 11).

Summary and Conclusion

The most important conclusion to be drawn from the results presented above is that a great deal of diversity exists in the procedures which state and regional research organizations use to select papers and other types of presentations for their annual meetings. As might be expected, some organizations have adopted procedures much like those used by the American Educational Research Association. These include multiple calls for papers issued through multiple channels, a large variety of session types and presentation formats, and formal review procedures implemented by specially designated program committees. Other organizations, however, appear to operate with much less structure. Thus, only 31% of the organizations reported using blind review procedures and over half the groups reported acceptance rates of 80% or higher.

Comparisons of state and regional associations revealed that the diversity across types of organization was generally no greater than that found within either category. The one notable exception to this claim is that regional associations appear to have greater variety than the state groups in the types of sessions held at the annual meetings.

Taken together the results of this brief survey are likely to alarm some readers and enthrall others. Those who are alarmed will argue that regional and state organizations must model more faithfully the procedures of AERA; those who are enthralled will argue that state and regional research organizations serve a different purpose than AERA, and thus they must solicit and review papers differently than the parent organization. Further, they will argue that it is precisely this diversity that gives the state and regional groups their particular flavor and charm. Assuming that the annual meetings provide the membership with interesting and informative sessions, I see no reason to want to reduce this diversity.

Table 1

Response Breakdown for Survey Questionnaire
By Type of Organization and Total Group

Question/Response Category	Type of Organization State	Regional	Total
1. Frequency of Meetings			
Once a Year	71*	88	81
More Than Once a Year	29	11	19
2. Type of Sessions at Meetings			
Paper	86	100	94
Symposia	86	77	81
Round Tables	43	100	69
Invited Speeches	100	77	88
Training Sessions	43	33	38
Grad Student Work in Progress	--	11	6
Poster Sessions	14	--	6
Reviews of Research	--	11	6
3. Procedures for Soliciting Presentations			
Announcement in Association Newsletter	43	66	56
Announcement in Other Newsletters	--	33	19
Mailed Call for Papers	57	55	56
Personal Contacts	43	44	44
Recommendations from Officers	43	33	38
No Response	--	11	6
4. Selection of Papers, Symposia etc.			
All Proposals Reviewed (except invited)	43	55	50
Some Proposals Reviewed	43	44	44
No Reviews of Any Kind	14	--	6
5. Types of Reviewers			
Program Committee	43	55	50
Volunteers from Membership	--	11	6
Review Panel from Program Committee	43	33	38
No Review	14	--	14
6. Selection of Reviewers			
Program Chair	29	22	25
Volunteers	29	11	19
Board Appoints	14	55	38
Haphazard with Regional Representation	14	--	6
No Review	--	--	--
No Response	14	11	13

*Indicates the percent of respondents selecting that category

Table 1 (Continued)

Question/Response Category	Type of Organization		
	State	Regional	Total
7. Number of Reviews			
2	29	11	19
3	43	44	44
4	14	22	19
5	--	11	6
No Review	14	--	6
No Response	--	11	6
8. Review Blind			
Yes	43	22	31
No	43	66	56
No Review	14	--	6
No Response	--	11	6
9. Criteria Used to Judge Proposals			
Significance of Study	--	33	19
Quality	57	66	63
Communication Ability	--	55	31
Appropriateness to Membership	57	44	50
Theme	14	--	6
Subjective Holistic Judgement	14	--	6
No Review	14	--	6
No Response	14	22	19
10. Use of Rating Scales	--	55	31
Yes	--	55	31
No	86	33	56
No Review	14	--	6
No Response	--	11	6
11. Acceptance Rate			
20- 39	14	--	6
40- 59	--	11	6
60- 79	--	22	13
80-100	57	55	56
No Review	14	--	6
No Response	14	11	13